II. GEOGRAPHICAL FACTORS

121 This chapter is intended to give an outline of the geographical conditions of Angola and to point out the way in which these have influenced the growth of Umbundu culture in all its aspects.

A presentation of geographical data is of primary importance here, and the actual relationship between the facts of geography and culture is a matter for gradual evaluation in the following chapters. The extent to which geographic determinism has entered into the cultural growth of the Ovimbundu is particularly well seen in chapter V, "Economic Life," which deals with industries, agriculture, domestic animals, fishing, and transport.

The area of Angola is a factor of importance, for the greater the extent of any country the more diversified will be the products and the cultural differences. This is particularly true if there are considerable differences in the elevation, because altitude modifies temperature and affects the distribution of rainfall.

131 Angola has an area of almost 500,000 square miles. The greatest length is a distance of about 900 miles from the river Congo in the north to the region of South West Africa. The greatest breadth is about 700 miles from the Atlantic Ocean on the west to the borders of the Rhodesian plateau in the east. This range over twelve degrees of latitude, from 5° S. to 17° S., in association with differences in altitude, have produced ecological regions which are described in the following paragraphs.

132 The northern part of Angola is ecologically a part of the Congo
● 311 basin, with conditions of heat and moisture giving rise to a dense
167 tropical flora. Owing to the presence of tsetse fly, the great heat, and the lack of open grasslands, such country is unsuited for the rearing of cattle, while agriculture, including cultivation of maize, is restricted to forest clearings. Manioc, palm trees, peanuts, and sweet potatoes are the chief products serviceable to man. This region was, according to the historical evidence of chapter III, the area in which the Ovimbundu moved before they entered the Benguela Highlands of central Angola. Parts of chapters III and X ("Historical Sources" and "Culture Contacts," respectively) are devoted to an analysis of the cultural factors of the Congo area from the year A.D. 1500 to the present day.

131 The central portion of Angola is the area most important in this research because it is the home of the Ovimbundu, whose cultural

6:Edwards E-5 (1955-1956)1962
FP13 Mbundu FP13

might be told that he lived elsewhere. This would turn out to be a reference to the government headman. A request for the *esekulu* (literally elder father, hence elder or headman) might also bring me in contact with the 'elder of the school', the representative of the local Christians. I therefore began to ask for 'the old one' (*ukulu*), or to inquire 'Who built first?' or 'Who settles disputes?', when I wanted to find out who was the traditional headman.

Even these questions did not necessarily get a clear answer. Thus the village of Kamupa had been founded by Lusase, its government headman was Guilherme, and, as neither of these was living near, minor disputes were referred to two old men who lived in the village. Apart from the government headmen, there are also traditional headmen recognized by the post, who did not have the privileges and the duties of the former. It may happen in a particular village that the man recognized as traditional headman by the post is not the same person as the real traditional headman recognized by the village. This was the case in Epalanga, where Sapapula was unquestionably the headman recognized by the villagers but the duties of dealing with policemen fell to Luanga. In the local discussions as to the recruitment of road-workers, and so on, Sapapula had much more influence than Luanga.

The position of the traditional headman nowadays lacks clearly defined powers, or symbolic value. A village is frequently known by its founder's name. The headman is the only person who can speak of 'my village' as opposed to 'our village'.[19] The firing of the long grass in the dry season which marks the beginning of the great communal hunts is theoretically begun by the village headman, though this is not always adhered to in practice. The headman does not take any active part in leading the hunt, nor are the people who go on a communal hunt necessarily confined to the inhabitants of one village. He has 'to show land' to new-comers to the village. This reflects a moral responsibility to his people rather than control of land tenure, since there is always spare land away from the villages which anybody can cultivate. He also has the responsibility of hearing minor disputes. He receives from the

[19] Ibid., pp. 36–37.

6:Edwards E-5 (1955-1956)1962
FP13 Mbundu FP13

CHAPTER V

VILLAGE ECONOMICS

The homeland of the Ovimbundu, the Benguela Highland, is mostly over 4,000 feet above sea-level. Rainfall is 50–60 inches a year, and the rainy season is from September to April.[1] In this season after a downpour there is frequently a cooling of the air, and the most intense heat comes just before the rainy season, during the dry spell that occurs in or about February, and just after the rains. Between the middle of May and the middle of July the nights and early mornings are bitterly cold but the days are pleasantly cool. After the middle of July the temperature gradually rises.

The soil of the Highland is poor; the Ovimbundu industriously cultivate beans, manioc, maize, potatoes, and tobacco. Less frequently they have coffee plants, fruit trees, and sisal. Occasionally wheat is grown but the ground is not really suitable. I am told that rice could be grown in the stream valleys. Four field types are recognized by the Ovimbundu—*otjumbo* (garden), *onaka* (stream-valley garden), *ombanda* (in ground sloping up from a stream), and *epya* (a field away from the streams on level ground).[2]

Umbundu country is well supplied with water in streams and rivers, and the Ovimbundu have built irrigation channels wherever possible. Cultivation in the stream valleys, that is, of the *onaka* type of garden, has only been practised since the 1870's or 80's.[3] They are planted in August or the beginning of September, and give crops in December and January. The

[1] For an excellent account of Umbundu habitat see Childs, pp. 1–11.

[2] Albino Alves, *Dicionário Etimológico Bundo-Português*, Lisbon, 1951, Vol. I, p. 639 gives ombanda as a synonym of onaka.

[3] Private information.